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Editorial charters and newsroom councils in media corporations: a view from the perspective of corporate social responsibility

Abstract

Editorial charters and professional representation groups in media corporations are major self-regulatory tools often cited in the Spanish literature on journalism ethics and deontology, yet many corporations lack them and they are largely invisible to the public with only a few exceptions, such as the Newsroom Council of the Spanish public national television network TVE. This limited implementation contrasts with the increasing number of media corporations that have adopted corporate social responsibility (CSR) policies that should take into account the expectations of journalists as internal stakeholders. The present study examines the relationships between editorial management and CSR management as a possible approach to integrating corporate governance and news governance in media corporations. The study is based on in-depth interviews of members of newsroom councils in Spanish media companies. Discourse analysis of these interviews indicates that journalists in media organizations do not consider that their companies' CSR policies take into account their professional expectations, in the sense that journalists in these corporations do not perceive news governance and CSR management to be aligned. At the same time, the precarious labor market has led many journalists to stand up less to their employers on questions related to journalism standards. Nevertheless, many newsroom councils are effective at communicating complaints, violations and recommendations to corporate governance bodies.

Keywords
Editorial committees, editorial charters, corporate social responsibility, corporate reputation, stakeholders

1. Introduction

Increasing mistrust of organizations due to globalization and to the lack of responsibility criteria in corporate management (García-Marzá, 2004; Lozano, 2011) is affecting the media industry (Edelman, 2014), even though this industry derives most of its value from being perceived as credible (Farias, 2010; Morales et al., 2012). Indeed, the journalistic

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profession has been gradually losing social prestige (Entman, 1989; Merrit, 1995; CIS, 2013), in parallel with the erosion of journalistic autonomy within the corporation as a result of combined pressure from advertisers, external interests and the economic crisis (Díaz Nosty, 2011; APM, 2012; Macía & Herrera, 2010).

Journalists point to the lack of ethical leadership on the part of corporate managers as one of the principal obstacles to high-quality journalism that could restore the credibility of media and its professionals in the eyes of the public (García Avilés et al., 2014). Simultaneously restoring the credibility of both a media corporation and its journalists depends on how the public perceives credibility to be distributed between the two parties (APM, 2008). The ethics of journalists cannot be separated from the ethics of the organizations in which they work, as indicated by the Council of Europe in its resolution 1003 on journalism ethics (1993). In fact, the need for a strong, shared ethics regime among media companies and their journalists is a requirement of modern times, when ethical decision making has become a socially relevant issue (Cortina, 2003).

Corporate social responsibility (CSR), which aims to define and cultivate a program of ethically responsible decision making that integrates all the operations of a corporation, may be well suited as a corporate management tool to help restore credibility to journalism. It may also help invest new meaning into the concept of Journalistic Brands, so essential to creating reader loyalty, entering new markets or launching new initiatives (Arrese, 2013b).

CSR involves ensuring that corporate behavior takes into account the economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic expectations that the public holds for that corporation (Carroll, 1979). In other words, CSR means aligning corporate behavior with social norms, values and aspirations in a given geographical location and for a given time period. These norms, values and aspirations can be defined largely along three lines: labor-economic, ecological and sociocultural (Boatright, 1993). The present work will emphasize the labor-economic line, since it involves perceptions and policies about responsible management that directly affect the activities of journalists and news management.

The European Commission has taken into consideration the lines of action promoted by the CSR (2011), which are intended to cut across all the departments of a corporation (Cuesta, 2004). CSR is usually implemented to satisfy one or more of the following motivations: (a) contribute to society through implementation of ethically correct attitudes, (b) integrate social expectations into corporate behavior, (c) responsibly manage the corporation's power and (d) help achieve objectives that will bring long-term benefits to the corporation (Garriga & Melé, 2004).

Media companies should be concerned about integrating social expectations into their activities, and journalists are key to generating and managing credibility for their employers. Thus, consistent with stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984), journalists should play an essential role in corporate governance at companies that claim to be socially responsible. Stakeholder theory stipulates that corporations should take into account the expectations of groups that affect, or are affected by, corporate activities. Applying CSR and stakeholder theory to media companies means that managers should cultivate a corporate culture of responsibility towards their journalists (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2007:93).

In other words, news governance, personified by journalists and news editors, must be aligned with corporate governance, personified by executives who respond to market criteria. The success of a media corporation is threatened whenever it takes into account the interests of only shareholders or a single stakeholder (Stern, 2008). This implies that editors should be considered a key stakeholder of corporate governance, by virtue of their role in the corporation's mission of creating and managing information in ways that the public perceives as responsible and credible.

These considerations make clear that a major challenge to managing media companies is reconciling the demands of the various stakeholders (Stern, 2008; Arrese, 2013a). Key to

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this juggling act is managing the "creative inputs" of journalists (Arrese, 2013a: 370), who to a significant extent act as "Ingredient Brands" (p. 371). Establishing an appropriate relationship between corporation and journalists can help maximize the social value of corporate activities by increasing the perception of information quality and objectivity in the public (Benavides, 2012).

The ability of CSR to improve both corporate and news governance makes it a potentially excellent strategy for media corporations. A CSR-based approach implies codifying and protecting the autonomy of journalists to allow them to fulfill the public's expectations of their profession and thereby generate a product of value (Hallin & Mancini, 2004: 34). It also implies integrating news governance criteria into the action plans developed by corporate governance (Arrese, 2006). Some authors have proposed including the presence or lack of policies and safeguards of journalistic independence and of ethical journalistic practices as an additional indicator in the set used to assess the CSR of a media corporation (Morales et al., 2012). In fact, the Global Reporting Initiative mentions "Product Responsibility" in sections G3.1 and G4 about the media, arguing that media corporations should report how they monitor editorial independence and ensure compliance with the principles and standards of journalism ethics. In particular, the Initiative recommends that companies report whether they have a committee dedicated to monitoring journalism ethics, and whether journalist professional committees operate within the company (GRI, 2011: 37,465/4; 2014: 35–36). Ultimately all these questions are concerned with whether media corporations have embedded the objectives of credibility and quality into their global quality policies and procedures in ways that are not at odds with profitability (Sánchez-Tabernero, 2008).

Key tools for codifying credibility and quality into the work of journalists in a media corporation are so-called editorial charters and the newsroom councils that implement them and monitor their effectiveness. These councils represent the journalists working within a media company, and their function, composition and election procedures are described in the editorial charter.

2. Editorial Charters and their spread in Spain

Hugo Aznar (2005:175) defines editorial charters as

> A voluntary agreement between the professionals in a media corporation and corporate management that aims to create communication and collaboration links between editorial staff and corporate managers, as well as to codify a set of rights and obligations for both parties that they agree to uphold (authors' translation)

Editorial charters were inspired by the news editors' societies that formed within French media companies in the 1960s and 1970s, based on the precedent set up by *Le Monde* in 1951. The principal mission of these societies was to protect the professional independence of journalists from the company managers and owners; the idea was to achieve this mission by allowing these professionals to participate in the capital of the company (Schoewel, 1971: 126ff.). Today, editorial charters continue to reflect the demand of journalists and editors to participate in corporate governance, but this demand is fulfilled not by giving these professionals direct access to capital or to executive decision-making bodies, but rather by creating a mutually binding agreement between the professionals and corporate management (Aznar, 2005: 179).

Several characteristics of editorial charters are important for understanding their usefulness as tools to increase journalistic quality and credibility:
1. Resolution 1003 of the Council of Europe expressly recommended creating such charters (Council of Europe, 1993: Art. 32).

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2. Charters stipulate certain professional rights for members of the newsroom.

3. Charters stipulate the creation of participative bodies, elected from among all eligible news editors, which provide information and make nonbinding recommendations to members of corporate management about journalistic incidents, policies and procedures in the company. These committees are known by several names in Spain (*Comités de Redacción, Consejos de Redacción, Consejos Profesionales, Consejos de Informativos*), and we will refer to all such committees in the present text as newsroom councils, equivalent to the Spanish term *Comité de Redacción,* which is the most frequently employed in legal texts (Landeira *et al.,* 2006; Carrillo, 1997).

4. Charters stipulate deontological norms aligned with those generally applied to the entire journalistic profession.

Editorial charters have been implemented in only a few national media corporations in Spain (Sánchez de la Nieta, 2013). The first charter adopted by a media corporation in the country was at the daily newspaper *El País* en 1980. Subsequently *La Voz de Galicia* implemented in 1988 a charter inspired by that of *El País*. Next came *El Mundo* (1990), *El Periódico de Cataluña* (1993), Radio Televisión Valenciana (1996) and *La Vanguardia* (2001). Then charters were implemented in several public media corporations starting in 2000: Corporación Catalana de Medios Audiovisuales (2002), Radio Televisión Andaluza (2006), EFE (2006) and then Corporación RTVE (2008). Although this wave of new charters adopted by the largest public media organizations in Spain seemed to rekindle "a debate that had all but disappeared" (Fuente, 2008: 52), few examples of charter implementation have been recorded since. Two notable exceptions are the charter at the Basque public broadcaster (EiTB), approved in 2012, and the extension by Grupo Prisa of the editorial charter at *El País* to its other media outlets. No other Spanish media corporation, including Atresmedia, Mediaset, Vocento, or Unidad Editorial, has extended an editorial charter across all its news media.

If few media corporations have implemented editorial charters and created professional representation groups, even fewer describe these instruments on their websites, making the newsroom councils and their activities invisible to the public (Sánchez de la Nieta et al., 2013). This is a significant deviation from CSR, which promotes transparency as one of its principal attributes (Lizcano 2004: 293); communicating the existence of CSR and its activities can engender recognition and positive reaction from the public (Villagra & López, 2013).

3. Editorial charters, newsroom councils, and the discourse of responsibility and corporate reputation

Editorial charters and newsroom councils can help bridge the gap between the expectations of journalists (independence) and management (profitability), thereby assisting in reputation management and CSR management. Internal reputation can be considered "the space where corporate culture and objectives converge", and this convergence increases with "the number and intensity of goals shared by the corporation and its employees" (Villafañe, 2013: 108 -authors' translation-). Editorial charters and newsroom committees implicitly support CSR because they strengthen corporate governance, helping to close the gap between corporate culture and objectives. In this sense, responsible corporate governance of a media corporation should take into account that management has recognized the autonomy of journalists and editors and their role in maximizing value for the public, analogous to the way in which the CEO seeks to maximize value for the

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shareholder (Arrese, 2005). Editorial charters modulate editorial-corporate interactions by reconfiguring the journalistic process through organizational change (Fuente, 2009).

Using editorial charters and newsroom councils to integrate the expectations of journalists into corporate operations and respect their independence can be considered a criterion of responsibility for media corporations. Transparent fulfillment of this criterion can allow companies to position themselves as a responsible brand (Kajula et al., 2011). Such brands aim to demonstrate excellent management of ethical and social values to stakeholders (Villagra & López, 2013), and they include ethical expectations in their engagement with stakeholders (Kajula et al, 2011). From the moment in which CSR becomes an integral, meaningful part of the brand, corporate activity and the brand promise can engender confidence and credibility (Vallaster et al., 2012), which is indeed the fundamental objective of media corporations.

Corporate engagement with the expectations of internal stakeholders, in this case journalists and editors, can boost corporate reputation. This is defined as "a set of collective evaluations that is evoked in different audiences by the behaviour of a company and predisposes the audience towards support or resistance" (Carreras et al., 2013: 86). Corporate recognition of the freedoms and professionalism of journalists and editors should engender support in the company's own workers, potential readers and potential job applicants. This corporate behavior can create an environment more attractive to future applicants who are better qualified (Fombrum, 1996; Dowling, 2002) and who are willing to engage in more demanding work, perhaps even for lower pay than they would otherwise (Robert & Dowling, 2002).

Spanish media organizations appear to recognize and take some interest in these arguments, as revealed in a survey of corporate literature on corporate identity and CSR. This survey, conducted between September and November 2014, included all media corporations known to have editorial charters (Sánchez de la Nieta et al., 2013; Fuente, 2009; Aznar, 2005) and involved analysis of their corporate web pages on CSR, annual reports, CSR reports and relevant parts of strategic plans to which we had access. Table 1 synthesizes relevant assertions in corporate literature related to media companies' engagement with employees, including news editors.

Table 1. Internal stakeholders (editorial staff) and newsroom councils in media companies' corporate literature

Company	Relevant information found in the corporate literature	Editorial Charter and Newsroom Council	Publicly accessible CSR documenta-tion	External report auditing	CSR as a strategic decision	Mechanisms of dialogue with stakeholders
Spanish Radiotelevision Corporation (CRTVE)	*Editorial Charter*. "Establishes the rights and duties of news professionals to safeguard their independence … objectivity and veracity"[1]. *Internal communication.* "Through videos, a newsletter, meetings and written communications, the different departments …. and their employees are brought together. … Through 'RTVE talks' [a newsfeed/update service run by the CSR department and sent to all employees], we hear first-hand about management decisions and we learn of the work that our colleagues are doing"[2].	Yes, one Council per media outlet.	Yes	No	Not explicitly reported	Yes

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[1] RTVE (2014, July 28). RC. Engagement. [www.rtve.es/rtve/20140612/comunicacion-interna/953441.shtml]
[2] RTVE (2014, July 28). RC. Action guides. [www.rtve.es/rtve/20140526/rc-guias/943193.shtml]

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Radiotelevision of Valencia (RTVA)	*Corporate communication.* "With respect to internal communication, 809 announcements were published on the "What's going on?" intranet service about noteworthy activities of staff in the various production units"[3].	Yes, one Council per media outlet.	Yes, as part of the annual report.	No	No	No
Basque Public Radiotelevision (EiTB)	*Public service model.* [To exercise its mission, EiTB acts responsibly], which means exemplary management and transparency towards governmental and social institutions"[4]. *Leaders in information and news.* "EiTB promotes professional and independent news management that develops its own news agenda that is as complete and interesting as possible"[5]. *CSR Report, section on 'People'.* "EiTB engages in the social-professional development of its staff far beyond what the law requires in order to become an industry leader in staff training … to participate actively in the personal and professional development of its staff, and to promote equality policies, labor negotiations, work-family issues, … and the pride of belonging"[6]. *Interest group testing.* "We carry out surveys of attention and listening in internal and external interest groups in order to assess level of satisfaction and create a relationship with the client"[7].	Yes, one Council per media outlet.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
El Periódico de Catalunya	NOT REPORTED	Yes	No	No	No	No
La Vanguardia	NOT REPORTED	Yes	No	No	No	No
Audiovisual Media Corporation of Cataluña (CCMA)	*Style Guide.* "In 2012 a group to monitor adherence to the Style Guide was formed at both TV3 and Catalunya Radio". The group at TV3 comprised representatives from the news department … and the professional council"[8].	Yes, one Council per media outlet.	Yes, as part of the annual report.	No	Yes	No

[3] RTVA (2014, July 25). Annual Report 2012, Section 14.1 Corporate communication.
[www.canalsur.es/resources/archivos/2014/1/9/1389257021340MEMORIA2012.pdf, 74]
[4] EiTB (2014, July 26). EiTB Strategic Plan 2013-2016, Section "Public service".
[www.eitb.com/multimedia/corporativo/documentos/plan-estrategico-eitb-2013-2016.pdf, 18]
[5] EiTB (2014, July 26), *op. cit.,* 20.
[6] EiTB (2014, July 26). Social Responsibility Report 2011-2012, Section "People".
[www.eitb.com/multimedia/corporativo/documentos/memoria-responsabilidad-social-gizarte-erantzukizun-txostena-2011-2012.pdf, 43-44]
[7] *Ibid.,* 59.
[8] CCMA (2014, July 23). Annual Report 2012, Section "Engagement with quality: the CCMA Style Guide".
[www.ccma.cat/doc/memoria_anual_2012.pdf, 215]

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El País	*Informing responsibly*. "To guarantee compliance with this duty and this right [of information and freedom of expression], *El País* took the pioneering step of implementing, from its founding, several measures and processes to protect and promote professional ethical standards that have been implemented across all members of our media group. These measures include the adoption of an Editorial Charter, Editorial Code and a reader's Ombudsman. These ethical standards have permitted the development of a rigorous, high-quality news culture that has become a reference in Spain and the Americas"[9]. *Corporate values*. "Independence and rigor in their activities as information providers, educators and communicators; self-criticism for professional and personal improvement" *Reinforced values*. "Integrity. We understand integrity to be our sense of honesty, rigor, self-criticism, responsibility, independence and impartiality". [This section reprints a 1977 article by José Ortega Spottorno in which he discusses the Editorial Charter of *El País*.][10] *Dialogue and communication with our interest groups*. "The PRISA Group assumes its role of showing exemplary social responsibility towards its shareholders, investors and employees … To this end, the Group has instituted its own communication mechanisms … to collect opinions and sensitivities that allow us to respond to the demands and needs of these stakeholders"[11]. *Responsible management of our professionals*. "Through efficient and integrated personnel management, we strive to support the personal and professional development of every one of our workers"[12].	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
EFE	NOT REPORTED	Yes	No	No	No	No
La Voz de Galicia	NOT REPORTED	Yes	No	No	No	No
El Mundo	*Goals and target audience of the group's ethical code*. "The RCS group focuses its activity on the respect of the principles of freedom and pluralism, affirming the central right of the public to correct and complete information". *How the ethical code values people*. "The RCS group values knowing 'how to do' and 'how to let someone else do'. …The company favors conditions in which …. [workers] can express their competencies and personalities as much as possible, develop their competencies as the cornerstone of effective human resource management … [and] participate in the company's decision-making processes based on their abilities and competencies"[13]	Yes	Yes, as part of an article on the environment	No	No	No

[9] PRISA Group (2014, October 01). "Social responsibility: our commitment" and "Responsible leadership" [www.prisa.com/es/pagina/nuestro-compromiso/]

[10] PRISA Group (2014, October 01). Sustainability Report 2014. "The global group PRISA: mission, vision and values". [http://prisa.com/informe-anual-2014/wp-includes/flip/Informe_Anual_ES/index.html#/16/, 16-17]

[11] PRISA Group (2014, October 01). Executive Report on Sustainability 2014. "Sustainability at PRISA: discussions with our interest groups". [http://prisa.com/informe-anual-2014/wp-includes/flip/Resumen_ejecutivo_2014_ES/index.html#/40/, 41]

[12] PRISA Group (2014, October 01), op. cit., 42.

[13] Editorial Unit (2014, November 10). Ethical Code of the RCS MediaGroup. [www.unidadeditorial.com/codigo_etico.html]

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Table 1 shows that most of the corporations studied mention CSR policies or at least an engagement with employees. *El Periódico de Catalunya*, *La Vanguardia,* EFE and *La Voz de Galicia* do not report concrete lines of action, but they repeatedly mention an interest in the employee stakeholder, high-quality information, journalistic values and the search for brand differentiation based on journalistic rigor.

Corporate statements abound concerning the value attributed to the employees, including journalists, as key players in the organization's achievement of its objectives. This abundance contrasts with the scarcity of references to editorial charters and newsroom councils. Only three of the corporations analyzed speak explicitly of newsroom councils in their corporate literature:

1. CRTVE, on its CSR website, affirms that the editorial charter "lays out the rights and duties of professionals ... to safeguard their independence ... objectivity and veracity". The presence of this information on the website clearly positions the editorial charter within the company's CSR. On the other hand, the corporation makes no mention of the newsroom councils that exist across its various media outlets, nor of the work that they do as guarantors of the charter.

2. The CCMA, in its Annual Report 2012, indicates that the newsroom council is one of the bodies that safeguard the corporation's style guide. However, this information is not clearly linked to CSR or to an interest in making the council a differentiated element, or value-added proposition, within the company's strategic vision.

3. *El País*, of the PRISA Group, assigns great importance to the charter, which is mentioned on the Group's CSR website, in its sustainability report and in allusions to corporate values and dialogue with stakeholders.

These declarations confer on the employee a special status in corporate strategy, yet most do not explicitly mention the value that the editorial charters and newsroom councils bring to CSR policies. This is a notable omission because both CSR practices and stakeholder theory identify these factors as contributing mutually to CSR success. To understand how this omission occurred and how it may be improved, we wished to examine the operation of editorial charters more closely. Our aim was to understand the real links among the different parts of the media corporation and identify how these professional representative bodies regard and approach CSR. Therefore we conducted in-depth interviews with a subset of the media organizations that we surveyed in Table 1.

4. Objectives, hypotheses, and methodology

4.1. *Objectives and hypotheses*

The principal objective of the present study was to analyze the daily operations of newsroom councils and extract the principal elements in their discourse in order to establish the patterns of behavior and perspectives of these groups towards CSR. The following hypotheses guided the work:

H1: The general economic crisis and the labor-economic crisis specifically in the journalism sector have led to an abridgment of the rights and mechanisms of professional representation of editors and journalists at those corporations where such rights and representation already existed. In other words, the exigencies of economic sustainability have led editorial charters and newsroom councils to lose their effectiveness and prominence in media companies.

H2: The prominence of CSR in media corporations has not strengthened the relationship between corporate governance and news governance within those companies.

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Instead, CSR departments and newsroom councils often maintain a separate existence in the corporation, unaligned and rarely communicating with each other, leading them to follow different paths and show divergent behavior.

4.2. *Methodology and sample*

Qualitative research methodology has been a significant foundation of the research literature on consumers and their motivation during the act of purchasing (Nuttall et al., 2011), and the same is true of the literature on communication. Although some consider qualitative studies less rigorous than quantitative ones (Hooper, 2011), qualitative approaches can detect phenomena and relationships that quantitative ones may not (Kover, 1982). While qualitative methods do not provide data for statistical analysis as quantitative methods do (Chisnall, 2004), they can capture subtleties and low-frequency events that provide a richer, more complete picture of reality – all through optimal management of limited resources (Valles, 1997).

The present study takes a qualitative approach based on in-depth interviews of members of representative bodies in order to assess the prominence and effectiveness of newsroom councils within the larger media corporation, as well as to clarify the relationships between newsroom councils and CSR departments. The in-depth interview is a well-established qualitative method in social sciences that appeared when "the inaccessibility of information, marginalized by the scientific paradigm of distributive research, required social science researchers to adopt techniques of oral investigation" (Sierra, 1998: 297).

We aimed to interview members of the newsroom councils at all the media corporations mentioned in Table 2 that were active at the time of this study. When approached for inclusion in this study, *El Mundo* and *La Voz de Galicia* informed us that they did not have functioning newsroom councils, even though such bodies are stipulated in the editorial charters. In the case of CRTVE, we succeeded in interviewing one member of the newsroom council and one member in the area of interactive media, but we were unable to secure an interview with members of the newsroom council of RNE. For each newsroom council that granted us an interview, a single interview was conducted with the one or more members who agreed to participate in our study. All interviews were conducted between June and October 2014.

Table 2. Newsroom Councils represented among our interviewees

Media corporation	Spanish name of Newsroom Council
TVE	Consejo de Informativos
CRTVE Interactivos	Consejo de Informativos
EFE	Consejo de Redacción
TV3	Consejo Profesional
EITB	Consejo de Redacción
El País	Comité de Redacción
El Periódico de Catalunya	Comité Profesional
La Vanguardia	Consejo Profesional
CRTVA	Comité Profesional

4.3. *Interview structure*

Interviews were organized around six content blocks:

1. Election and composition of the newsroom council.

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2. Functional characteristics (e.g. organization, internal procedures, actions, themes covered).
3. Effectiveness criteria (e.g. influence over corporate decision making, reinforcement mechanisms).
4. Opinions and expectations about the future of the newsroom councils.
5. Relationship with the corporation's CSR.
6. Relationship with other committees representing workers, such as works councils (comités de empresa).

5. Results of the study

5.1. *Election and composition of the Newsroom Council*

The editorial charters of the media corporations analyzed here establish precisely the rules and procedures for electing members of the newsroom council, normally in an annex covering electoral regulations. In some cases, the human resources department convenes elections; in other cases, the outgoing council calls elections, and human resources simply counts the votes. In media corporations with a council for each of several media outlets, the same election rules and procedures govern the elections of all newsroom councils. CRTVE has separate councils for TVE (television), RNE (radio) and Interactivos (interactive media). EiTB has councils for Radio Euskadi, Radio Vitoria, Euskadi Irratio, EITBnet (on-line services) and ETB (television). CCMA has one council for television and another for Catalunya Radio. CRTVA has separate councils for Canal Sur TV, Canal Sur Radio and Canal 2 Andalucía.

The eligibility conditions determining who can vote for members of the newsroom council is a controversial point at many of the media corporations. The election is usually entrusted to the human resources department and is made public on the corporate intranet to allow the filing of complaints. In some cases, the charter specifies who can vote in the election, but different individuals sometimes interpret the text differently. To a large extent voting eligibility does not depend on job title or job responsibilities. Thus, the charter refers generically to "news editors" or, in the case of radio, "presenters" or "producers" or in the case of television, "producers". Some charters stipulate that voters be those responsible for certain tasks in the corporation, such as writing, editing, fact-checking, infography, or design. The editorial charter at *La Vanguardia* tries to include potential new journalism activities with the generic phrase "newly created journalistic tasks".

Several charters stipulate that voters have worked for a minimum period at the media corporation. All charters exclude as voters those with executive responsibilities in the company, although the ambiguity of this condition has been a source of debate during the organization of elections at some media corporations.

Most newsroom councils are elected for two-year terms, except for *El País* (one year) and *La Vanguardia* (three years). Most elected members serve out their terms; occasionally members step down early for personal reasons or health reasons, conflicts with a change in the individual's job responsibilities, or conclusion of an employment contract. The number of elected members ranges from five (EiTB, El País, EFE and *La Vanguardia*) to 13 (CRTVE). The number of members is nine at TV3 and seven at CRTVA and *El Periódico de Catalunya*. The odd number of members reflects the fact that Council decisions are often based on a simple majority.

Aside from fixing the total number of Council members, some Charters stipulate quotas for the members. The Charter at RTVE, for example, requires that at least one member of the Newsroom Council at TVE come from Catalonia. The Charter at CRTVA requires that six of the seven members of the Council at Canal Sur Radio be editors. Of

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these six editors, at least two must come from territorial centers and two from the territorial center of Seville in particular. One of the members must be a presenter or producer. Of the seven members of the councils at Canal Sur Televisión and Canal 2 Andalucía, six must be editors reflecting the same territorial distribution as Canal Sur Radio, and one must be a presenter or producer. These quotas at CRTVA aim to create newsroom councils that capture local realities and varieties, essential for producing content of value.

Most charters exclude members of works councils (comité de empresa) from also serving on the newsroom council. In all cases, only those individuals who voluntarily present their candidacy by the stipulated deadline, usually through the corporate intranet, are allowed to stand in the elections. In all cases, these candidacies have to be presented individually rather than as a group. Election data provided by our interviewees suggest that elections for newsroom councils at many of the media corporations in our sample attract a turnout of approximately 70% of eligible voters, though this figure is lower in the case of EFE (21.6%) and *El País* (57.2%).

5.2. *Functional characteristics of editorial charters and newsroom councils*

Most newsroom councils have a simple structure involving a president, who is always the candidate who received the greatest proportion of votes, and a secretary, who is named by the newly elected council. The remaining members do not have differentiated functions. Some newsroom councils have different structures: the newsroom council at RTVE also has a vice president, the council at *La Vanguardia* has only a secretary, while Councils at EiTB have only a president but no secretary.

The frequency with which newsroom councils meet varies among the media corporations in our sample. Though at most companies meetings are held monthly, at some companies meetings are called only when required by extraordinary circumstances. In all cases, newsroom councils meet monthly or trimonthly with executive management.

Decisions of the council are reached by unanimity or simple majority. None of the charters in our sample allows for qualified majority voting, though all allow for dissenting voting, even though only one case of such voting was mentioned in our interviews. Decisions are usually communicated via intranet to employees of the media corporation. Alternatively the decisions may be sent by email to all eligible voters. Only under special circumstances are these decisions published externally.

All charters guarantee that council members cannot be sanctioned or fired for their activities as editorial representatives, and our interviews confirmed that this guarantee is respected. One interviewee noted that "council members are always in the eye of the hurricane" and that they must take on an "uncomfortable role towards management" because in a certain way they are telling the managers that "they are not behaving professionally". This can lead to reticence on the part of journalists to raise their voice, even in the absence of explicit pressure from the corporation.

On some newsroom councils, members receive hourly remuneration for their participation. At nearly all media corporations in our sample, the company pays a per diem allowance to members who must travel to another city to attend meetings. Interviewees from some media corporations indicated that management was sometimes reluctant to cover these costs.

Charters clearly define the functions of the newsroom council and the areas under its jurisdiction. These include mediating in professional conflicts between editorial staff and management; proposing measures covering news content, coverage and programming; minimizing journalistic manipulation and other bad practices; and monitoring to ensure

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compliance with deontological principles. Interviews revealed a more extensive list of activities and themes covered by newsroom council discussions and decisions:

1. Analyze job specialization across units.
2. Reduce excessive length of news programs.
3. Issue reactions in support of colleagues impeded in their journalistic duties or unjustly pressured by political parties.
4. Refuse to participate in press conferences where questions are forbidden.
5. Improve electoral coverage of political parties.
6. Clarify the difference between information and advertising.
7. Reject the signing of commercial agreements that require journalists to prepare news that are not of interest to the public.
8. Differentiate more clearly between information and opinion.
9. Respond to criticism from other media corporations.
10. Develop recommended actions for covering complex topics (e.g. infancy, gender violence, suicide).
11. Recommend measures against professional burn-out.
12. Detect and examine deviations and omissions from the public service mandate at public media outlets.
13. Align information content with the interests of the public.

Based on our interviews, the conscience clause and right to professional secrecy, which are codified in all editorial charters in our sample, do not usually come up in newsroom council discussions. Most interviewees indicated that these issues arose only in cases of journalists wishing to withdraw their byline from a controversial news report.

One interviewee indicated that often it is the news editors who propose issues to the council, while at other times the council consults news editors when developing its agenda. In still other cases, the council reacts *ex officio* to certain controversial issues.

Although newsroom councils across the media corporations in our sample share many concerns and deal with many of the same issues, our interviews turned up no evidence that the councils ever unite forces, either with each other or with press associations.

5.3. *Effectiveness criteria of editorial charters and newsroom councils*

The interviews confirmed that newsroom councils have no executive or sanction authority, consistent with the powers specified in the charters. Their function is consultative only, and most interviewees indicated that they felt these councils played a useful role in helping to ensure journalistic quality. This overall sentiment was summarized well by one interviewee: "[management] sometimes takes into account our considerations, though less than we would like. Our relationship with news managers is more fluid than our relationship with executive management."

Although newsroom councils have limited ability to influence corporate decisions –"the company continues to do what it was going to do", as one interviewee said– all interviewees felt that their opinion did count in the long term. As one member of a newsroom council said, "we are like Chinese water torture [to corporate management]"; this interviewee felt that the value of his efforts lay in injecting arguments in defense of professional quality into internal debates within the organization. One editor on a newsroom council said, "It is important that this 'Jiminy Cricket' exist because someone has to stand up for journalistic quality, and we are journalists talking about journalism". On the other hand, another member of the same news council commented that defending the quality of news content is

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not seen as a priority in the current precarious labor situation. "We continue to be a Ferrero Rocher for someone who has nothing to eat", he said.

5.4. *Opinions and expectations about the future of newsroom councils*

Interviewees expressed their belief in the necessity of strengthening these mechanisms in media corporations that already have them and of extending them to ones that do not. One interviewee summarized the belief of his entire newsroom council when he said: "We believe that the council is very useful not only for its activities but because its very existence makes clear the desire to work with the editorial staff and take their opinions into account." He added that the rest of his council considered these institutions important "because they stand up for the professionalism of the product and for its clarity and objectivity, which is extremely important in this age in which social networks provide easy access to instantaneous information without verification".

Along similar lines, another interviewee commented that these institutions play an important role in defending journalistic quality "because they allow one of the agents in the process, namely journalists, to make their voice heard in decision-making circles". In this way, "an institution exists that stands up for professional ethics so that not everything is left to the vagaries of business, political or audience considerations".

Another aspect of the efficiency of newsroom councils became clear when an interviewee pointed out that these councils are a necessary part of a media industry in which business models are changing and in which the tempo has increased so much due to technology that no time is left for reflection. "Editorial staff have to do more and more things, in less time, and the opportunity to reflect is being lost. The council requires that staff make the effort to reflect". This perspective was supported by another interviewee:

> In the current climate, budget cuts and labor conflicts are eclipsing other problems that are also important. But labor conditions are significantly affecting professional behavior, and this is where Newsroom Councils and executive management can work together, without mistrust or suspicions.

Comments from yet another interviewee followed similar lines: he insisted that newsroom councils are particularly necessary in these times when business models are changing, "with fewer human resources, more competition, falling advertising revenues and the presence of new advertising strategies". In the face of all these challenges, the interviewee emphasized the importance of the fact that "someone in the editorial office was thinking beyond daily survival".

5.5. *Relationship of newsroom councils with CSR*

None of the interviewees gave any indication that the work of the newsroom council is linked directly to CSR activities at their organizations. In fact, at many media corporations, the council is quite unaware of what the CSR department is doing. This is partly "because they have so little to do with us, in this sense, so we really aren't aware of corporate initiatives"; another interviewee commented, "[CSR] is not very evident because, if it were, we would be aware of it". Despite the affirmations and declarations in the corporate literature that we analyzed (Table 1), most interviewees felt that the interests of corporate governance and news governance diverged substantially.

At the same time, many of the interviewees stressed the potential for linking the newsroom council and CSR. Several interviewees pointed out that the Council's work could be considered social responsibility of the corporation: "I never stopped to think about it, but.... yes, it would be interesting .... we might even gain a more powerful voice"; "Yes, I believe we would have something to say and that they [in CSR] could consult us".

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Interviewees further pointed out that newsroom councils can strengthen CSR activities by fomenting dialogue with external interest groups ("I believe that they … should rely on councils to communicate to them the 'talk on the street' "), and that this would not require modifying or reducing any of the council's existing functions. "I think the newsroom council has completely defined functions, I wonder whether a CSR linkage would overlap with one of those. It may be compatible. I think it should be included." However, "this type of thing has to be initiated by the businessmen".

In summary, informants do not currently observe a relationship between newsroom councils and CSR, but most believe that such a relationship could exist.

5.6. *Relationship with other committees representing workers, such as works councils*

Our interviews suggest that newsroom councils and works councils operate in different worlds connected by few bridges that, when they do exist, emerge only under specific circumstances in which professional issues (covered by the newsroom council) and labor issues (covered by the works council) directly and urgently interact. Most interviewees called these bridges "inexistent". As one said, "The territories are very well defined. There is a clear barrier there." Another said:

> The Workers' Committee and the Newsroom Council play roles in some way complementary but different in the defense of the profession, and so each one acts within its own area, without interfering in the other's area. If it were different, each would lose its independence.

This division between areas of activity manifests in different ways at different media corporations, but it is a source of tension in at least two companies in our sample. At one of them, an interviewee cited "substantial disdain in workers' committees toward the newsroom council"; at the other, unions occasionally oppose the position of the Council, siding instead with corporate management. "What we say is contested by the very unions".

It should come as no surprise, then, that newsroom councils do not participate in collective negotiations, they are not consulted about the content of collective agreements and their relationships to other bodies within the company are not codified in any official documents.

Nevertheless, most interviewees pointed out that internal corporate discussions occasionally raise problems or situations that directly affect both the professional and labor worlds. Examples mentioned in our discussions include changes in the organizational model of the news production process, workforce restructuring for economic reasons or to create synergies, and efforts to regulate the use of social networks. These cases trigger informal mechanisms of interaction and collaboration: "We do not get involved in the labor area except when it concerns professional working conditions", one of the interviewees said. Another interviewee described more fluid interactions:

It is in the interests of the newsroom council to have more a fluid relationship with the workers' committee because we have seen that there are cases when it is difficult to separate the labor aspects from the professional aspects, since the precarious labor market can directly affect information content and freedom of information.

6. Conclusions and future lines of research

6.1. *Conclusions*

These interviews lead to the conclusion that, as predicted in our initial hypothesis H1, the economic crisis overall and in the journalism sector has affected the efficiency of editorial charters and newsroom councils. In fact, two of the media corporations in our sample, *El*

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Mundo and *La Voz de Galicia*, stipulated the creation of newsroom councils in their charters but do not have them. Among the remaining corporations in our sample, members of the council expressed their opinion that precarious labor conditions have made some journalists hesitant about raising quality issues with corporate management that might affect the company's economic sustainability in any way.

Similarly, the interviews support our hypothesis H2 that the widespread importance of CSR in media corporations has not translated into a strong relationship between corporate governance and news governance. This lack of alignment is all the more striking given that newsroom councils seem to be ready to contribute to CSR if asked.

In summary, the present study shows that the few newsroom councils operating in Spain have already proven themselves to be a valid instrument for defending professional standards within media corporations. Organizations with these councils pay greater attention to CSR in areas related to journalism, and they realize that an essential part of their reputation depends on their commitment to professional values and the expectations of their editors, as codified in their editorial charters.

6.2. *Future lines of research*

The present study opens up future lines of research for further analysis:

1. The discourse analysis of professionals described here can be complemented with discourse analysis of CSR managers in the same media corporations in order to identify converging attitudes or perspectives that can suggest how to integrate the two worlds.
2. Studies similar to the present work can be undertaken in other countries where similar internal procedures for managing information quality have been implemented.

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